



ACHIM SZEPANSKI 2024-01-27

“POLE POSITION & “SAAL6” IN ENGLISH

GOSSE, GROSCHENROMAN NOVEL, POLE POSITION, SAAL6

Pole Position:

The fantasy that sex requires money and that money entails sex gives Mansfeld, a fund manager, the semantic tension of a winner who lives from what suits him best. Against anti-banker slogans such as “Trading derivatives is like betting on horses”, he opts for the formula “Trading derivatives is like letting horses run”, and wins. He is accompanied by two comrades-in-arms, Chief K, who is drunk on philosophical discourse and wanders around various table dance bars in the city, and the transeidetic Snaffu, who was given a special gift as a result of a childhood accident and uses it to design models’ bodies, a mixture of virtual body sculpting and tattoo practice, in a villa rented by Mansfeld. Table dancers circulate with post-feminist sophistication and cunning, figures such as Dr Schönblick appear, strange cutting and sexual

practices are carried out, obscure speculative deals are constantly taking place, and who knows with what success. An apparatus of essayistic footnotes completes the novel. These include discussions of Deleuze/Guattari's philosophy, Marx's critique of political economy, discourses on contemporary financial capitalism and the sex industry.

Saal6: In 2036, the entire city is stuck in Room 6, especially with regard to the real-time circulation of fully electronic computer trading, whose pathologies top banker Dr Dr Hanselmann believes he can cure with the help of the globally operating Esperanto Bank, if only he finally succeeds in introducing world money. At the same time, the unlikely couple Alfons and Alonso – a former philosopher and an ageing celebrity chef – sit by a duck pond in the city forest and observe the strange mingling and mingling of rich leisure-time homeless people and obscure political activists in time-hallowed dialogues in the city's bars and VIP clubs. Strange characters such as Freaky Franky, the manic, and Snaffu, the eidetic, plough the banking scenes, equally doped by art and credit bubbles, plus the city forest and the station district, advertisers go crazy or not, and only the summer remains a sideways movement in 2036.

Cord Riechelmann in Jungle World:

If, as Aristotle said, one of the tasks of art is to show how things should certainly never be, then Achim Szepanski's novel "Saal 6" is great art. That's what you think at first. Until, at a fairly advanced stage of reading, you come across a scene that deals with the soundscape in "a catering system supported mainly by social transfer payments". This refers to a kitchen for the poor and homeless where different chefs take turns working. And the two-page description of the clanging and clattering of pots and pans, the "excited chatter of elderly and poor people" and the career of a two-star RTL TV chef as a model for a new kind of celebrity, dispelled any impression of exaggerated hyperrealism. Suddenly the novel seemed to become real. It made you wonder for a moment whether you had read it correctly or whether it was just the old Berlin syndrome again.

Szepanski's story is mainly set in the Frankfurt banking milieu, which Berliners naturally have no idea about, whereas they know all about the poor and their kitchens. However, this realisation immediately had a devastating effect. Because if the self-optimisation techniques of women and men in the biotope of banks, marketing and stylish bars really have reached this level of acceleration, then you yourself have become the most left behind number imaginable. Up until this point, we had thought: OK, the man is exaggerating, he's just trying to paint a picture of how things could turn out if we don't watch out and let these financial men do their thing. But that's not the case. It's more likely that everything has long been like that in Frankfurt am Main.

That's where Nicole S., one of the main characters of "Saal 6", works. She is head of department at the marketing agency H.O.M.O., a kind of model agent, a woman in her 30s with long, straight, black hair, "who knows like no other in her industry that both her symbolic and her physical capital, she herself as living money, is always already inscribed in the calculating crediting within the professional fields that enable the circulation of priced-out seductive powers on a lucrative level, be it as a partner, advertising specialist, entertainer or as a financial assistant within the framework of an immense demand economy. Nicole S. likes to say, in the words of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, "Taste is how I define myself in my social

field."

You could quote 30 or 40 such sentences from the book as examples of how Szepanski never creates the feeling that you are reading literary fiction here, despite the exuberant wordplay. You enjoy reading these things because they always work with a surplus of possibility-reality and are very close to the times.

The novel is set in 2036 – at least the year appears once – but its words, figures of speech and conceptual landscapes are very close to today. As close as the Frankfurt city forest, which is something of an escape point from the banking world and where autonomous people prepare to revolt under the watchful eye of minor police officers.

As depressing as the world of Dr Dr Hanselmann, the not at all unsympathetic manager of the Esperanto Bank, is at times in its glaringly illuminated poverty of money, one is nevertheless pleased that someone is prepared to tell us about the man with the double doctorate. And of course this has to do with the person of Achim Szepanski.

It was 1994 or 1995 when we first saw a record labelled "Mille Plateaux" in the old Hard Wax shop on Reichenberger Strasse in Berlin, one of the most important techno record shops in techno Germany. It hadn't been long since the Berlin publishing house Merve had published a German translation of "Tausend Plateaus", one of the main works by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. And now the disc of a label that had named itself after it was on the table. Quite enthusiastically, we asked our friends from Hard Wax what cool stuff it was. The friends only replied with an implied dimpled smile, which at the time meant: "That's Frankfurt, that's shit." The friends from Hard Wax ran the label "Basic Channel", singular, and they were masters of omission and reduction, even one word carried too much uncontrollable meaning for them. This was the opposite of Mille Plateaux and Achim Szepanski, the inventor and creator of Mille Plateaux. Szepanski had actually borrowed the name from Deleuze in a letter, and as a Deleuzian, one followed the work of Mille Plateaux despite having studied techno in Berlin, until this label also went down with techno culture. Which was also fun because Szepanski was and is a real Deleuze reader. He wasn't one of those chatterboxes who had studied comparative literature at the FU Berlin, came from Switzerland and now discovered punk with the speed of a Bernese mountain dog and thought they were philosophers because they knew someone who had once had dinner with Derrida.

Szepanski was immersed in Deleuze's thinking; even as a techno-theorist, he could surf through his main work "Difference and Repetition" as if he had grown up in the waves of the book. And nothing has changed. "Ontology understood as a constructive activity. One makes the existent univocal; univocality asserts that the mosquito expresses the same being as a human being", reads one passage in "Saal 6". There is no better way to weave Deleuze's concerns in "Difference and Repetition" into a novel. At the same time, Szepanski also becomes a constructivist who creates the Frankfurt banking world, and does so in a way that makes you want to get involved in this world – at least for the duration of the reading. The book is much more likeable than anything David Foster Wallace has ever written. And for the simple reason that Szepanski doesn't feel as terribly superior as Foster Wallace.

This needs to be emphasised because in an interview in the current issue of De:Bug, Szepanski explains in every second sentence how much he has in common with Foster Wallace. In literary terms, at any rate, the relationship is very close. Which is not surprising, however. Szepanski is not one thing: an ambitious writer. He just writes, and writes like the devil.

“Saal 6” is just the first volume of a trilogy that is due to be published this year by his publishing house Rhizomatique. After the decline of techno culture, the bankruptcy of his label and an undignified legal battle over the name Mille Plateaux that lasted for years, someone has come back, which is something that cannot be said of all creators of the great techno era. That’s not just nice, it’s great, because Szepanski obviously didn’t get stuck on E like Nicole S.

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